

## **TIGER HILLS ARTS ORGANIZATION**

By Ida E. Sanderson

Geographically, the Tiger Hills Arts Association is Manitoba's largest. Within the confines of seven municipalities (Argyle, Lorne, Louise, South Cypress, South Norfolk, Strathcona, and Victoria), it provides from its Holland-based office, a wide variety of programs geared to meet the cultural needs of the communities it serves.

In a rural setting, what inspired the formation of this non-profit organization?

IN the 1970's a nucleus of talented, arts-oriented residents of the Holland area suggested a grand piano for its newly-built hall would be a decided asset. Following the purchase, members of that same group---teachers of voice, band and piano---combined their expertise with that of their students to present concerts. Soon guest choirs and bands were featured events.

As programming expanded, so did the out-of-town interest. Administration and funding became immediate concerns.

A charter, signed February 10, 1978 qualified the brand-new Tiger Hills Arts Association for grants from the Department of Cultural Affairs. With both funding and capable leadership available, a fledgling organization suddenly took wings.

Bev De'Athe, a music teacher hired by the local School Board, became the first Executive Director—a position she filled with zest and imagination until 1986 when she was named Executive Director of the Manitoba Association of Community Arts Councils.

Bev's replacement was Karen Oliver, a natural for the job description. Hired in 1983, on a five-month grant to organize the Portage Plains library in Holland, she stayed, gaining experience in the many facets of T.H.A.A. activities.

Those services, which provide a wide spectrum of multigenerational programming, include Suzuki Strings, bus tours for seniors, woodcarving, sketching, watercolour, crafts, music theory, drama and writing. Workshops, on a variety of subjects, are organized.

Four events, annually, are sponsored by T.H.A.A. - Festival Showcase, the Talent Search, Canada Day festivities and the Christmas Gala.

Many remember the excitement when the first top-name musician entertained in the Concert Series. It was fall, 1982. Toronto based Moe Koffman and his Jazz Quintet came to town---and so did the press. The reporter was incredulous that Holland, a 'blip on the flat prairie', could be hosting an entertainer the caliber of Mr. Koffman. So intriguing did editors across the nation find the resulting story that many papers copied. "What will be next," queried the young man. "Ballet, the Russian Bolshoi troupe?"

The Concert Express Series is designed to give rural residents access to entertainment unlikely to come to small towns---the Royal Winnipeg Ballet, the Philharmonic Choir, productions at Rainbow Stage. Buses on Highways #2 and #23 pick up patrons, many of whom wouldn't attempt to drive in Winnipeg to the Concert Hall, Manitoba Theatre Centre or Kildonan Park.

The Concert Series continues. Following that memorable evening with Moe Koffman we've been favored with a delightful variety of performers---Haygood Hardy, Shirley Eikhard, Connie Kaldor, Primadonna, the Vancouver Chamber Choir, the Winnipeg Symphony Orchestra, Contemporary Dancers, Yugoslavia's Frulica Dance Troupe, the Rankin Family, George Fox. The list grows long of individuals, duos, quartets and groups (one band was from Israel) that continue to bring professionalism to the stages of the T.H.A.A. area.

Any concert to be recorded by the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation is scheduled for buildings with the finest acoustics---the Catholic Churches in Somerset and Mariapolis and the United Church in Cypress River.

In August of 1988, Karen Oliver resigned in order to accept the Directorship of the Manitoba Association of Arts Festivals.

Susan Dickens, who succeeded Karen as Executive Director, in August of 1989, handed over the reins to Lois Robertson.

Lois' foresight and superb managerial skills guided the Tiger Hills Arts Association through a decade when funding, which earlier had been so available for the arts, was cut drastically. To pursue other interests, Lois resigned in June of 1999.

Through the years, with T.H.A.A. as an umbrella group, SUB groups formed. Today, the Tiger Hills Amateur Theatre remains active and does the Prairie Red Coats Band, Country Quills, the Tiger Hills Arts and Crafts Guild and the Group of Eight Art Club.

With its emphasis on long-term development and education, an Art Gallery opened in the Holland office. School classes are Arts-related programs, to be shared in partnership, are offered schools within the Prairie Spirit School Division. The visual arts and music library maintained by THAA provides resource material for teachers.

Scholarships, within the following classifications, are awarded annually---A. to finalists of the Talent Search B. an Arts Career Award of \$1,000.00 to assist its recipient in furthering studies in either music or the visual arts. C. Concert Series tickets, one series to each of the T.H.A.A.'s five festivals. As well, under the sponsorship of the International Ambassador of Music program European bands, when preparing their itineraries for Manitoba tours, include towns within the T.H.A.A. area.

The staff is grateful to the four newspapers within the boundaries of the Arts Association for their support in carrying news releases and advertising---their main links with the public. T.H.A.A.'s main link with its membership remains ARTSBEAT, a publication which features coming events, concert reviews, reports from members of the Executive, profiles and a submission of either prose or poetry, courtesy of the Country Quills.

THAA's Executive, Board of Directors and committees are linked by a common bond---a love of the arts. Its members, representative of the communities in this large area, channel their thoughts into providing new programming while maintaining existing ones still in demand.

The Tiger Hills Arts Association, has in 1999, completed 21 years of programming and services. Its mission statement continues---to promote lifetime involvement in the visual, performing and literary arts through the development of varied program of cultural activities in the Tiger Hills area.

To Rosalie Sigurdson has been handed the task of guiding the Tiger Hills Arts Association in a new millennium. Appointed Executive Director in July of 1999, to replace Lois Robertson, she brings to the position the considerable experience gleaned in her 13 years as a staff

member. That exposure will prove invaluable as future cultural programs and activities are planned for Tiger Hills, an association considered the rural heartland of the arts.

It was in the fall of 2000, after Rosiles decision to pursue other interests, that Denise Walley accepted the job of guiding the THAA in the new millennium.

With the announcement of a new complex planned for Holland, and which will house both the arts office and the gallery, Denis acknowledges the days ahead will be challenging and exciting.

(The McFeetor's Centre officially opened September 2006 in the former Union Bank building.)